

The Determination of PKNYs to
Education

This document discusses
the need for Aspiria

— high % of PK structure
Voc source

— high avg. rates

→ need to address not
hide PK problems

→ need to reformat
program from "middle
class" to "entry to
middle class" — in the
beginning org only 3 yrs
old

1 1 1 1 1
1 1 1 1 1

1/20/98

The Determination of Puerto Rican New Yorkers to
Develop Their Own Capabilities Through Education

Address delivered at the
Fifth Annual Conference on
Education for New Yorkers of
Puerto Rican Background

By: Antonia Pantoja
Executive Director
ASFIRA, an agency of the
Puerto Rican Forum, Inc.
March 6, 1965, Loeb Student Center
New York University

The general concepts and methods of guidance are the same for Puerto Rican as for other children. But it is not about guidance as such that I am going to speak today. What I am going to present to you today is a situation which requires that Puerto Rican children in New York receive a special service to help them overcome the destructive effects of the crisis situation which surrounds them.

A shadow has been cast over our children by the vicious cycle of poverty in which we are caught in this city. An organization of Puerto Ricans known as the Puerto Rican Forum has acted upon its responsibility by concluding that education is almost the only channel left for our children to escape the detrimental effects of that vicious cycle. To implement directly such a decision the Puerto Rican Forum has created a service agency that would systematically and professionally help Puerto Rican youths make use of education.

Through the development of a pool of well educated persons, this agency will help to shape the kinds of leaders who will be capable of establishing self-help efforts for our community. This service agency is ASPIRA. Through its philosophy of work, method, staff and board, ASPIRA is uniquely prepared to offer to Puerto Rican children not only the motivation to want and to pursue the best education available and possible for them, but also is uniquely prepared to provide for the development of group identity which must be present for the emergence of a positive self-image. These two latter concepts, group identity and a positive self-image are essential in order to function from a position of strength as fully participating citizens with our fellow New Yorkers.

What is the crisis situation surrounding the Puerto Rican children in New York to which I referred? An overview of some of the basic facts concerning Puerto Rican New Yorkers dramatically reveals a vicious cycle of poverty in which Puerto Ricans are trapped. According to the 1960 census figures, the unemployment of Puerto Ricans in New York is 9.9%, higher than that of other whites and of Negroes. Out of 613,000 Puerto Ricans 51.4% live in families with incomes below what has been considered poverty incomes, \$4000.00 and under. Living in the midsts of a city where technological advances make it mandatory that a person possess at least a high school education to attain employment, 87% of the Puerto Ricans, 25 years and over, have not finished high school and 52.9% have not finished grade school. Puerto Ricans are employed primarily in the low income low status occupations; 70% of the men and 78% of the women work in such occupations, while 5.9% of the men and 4.0% of the women are in the upper income and high status occupations such as the professions, the technical, the administrative and managerial fields.

Since it has been said that poverty is inherited and passed on from generation to generation I think it is worth noting certain facts which will throw some light on the possibility of the second and subsequent generations breaking out of this pattern. Puerto Rican New Yorkers are very young as a group. 47% of the men are 20 years and under; 51.9% of the males are between the ages of 20 to 64 years and only 1.5% are 65 years old and over. 45% of the female Puerto Ricans fall into the group 20 years old and over. 45% of the female Puerto Ricans fall into the group 20 years of age and under; 52.4% are between the ages of 20 to 64 years and only 2.5% are 65 years of age and over. As a result

of the number of children in the group a relatively small portion of the Puerto Ricans are at their most productive working years and these must carry the burden of supporting a much larger percentage of minors. An analysis of the 315,000 Puerto Ricans who live in poverty will further show that poverty is concentrated in large families. Of the Puerto Ricans living in impoverished circumstances, 61.9% were in family constellations of five or more members, so that the conditions of poverty affect heavily families with children, casting a shadow over the future of a generation of youth. For the children of the poor there is in our democratic society only one avenue out, and that is through education. Because of this it is important that we examine the situation of Puerto Rican children in the New York City school system in our search for trends and also examine the possibilities of Puerto Rican New Yorkers breaking out of the poverty trap. Puerto Rican children comprise 17.1% of the total public school enrollment in New York City; they are 19.8% of the elementary school enrollment, 17.9% of the junior high school, 7.2% of the academic high school 22.5% of the vocational high school and 38.6% of the special school enrollment. In a world of rapid technological revolution where automation is replacing man in those tasks where muscle and manual labor was essential, and where some degree of post secondary education is becoming mandatory, Puerto Rican children are disproportionately grouped in the vocational high schools. A disproportionately low number are found in academic high schools and leads me to ask a question which plagues many Puerto Ricans; how many of the children in the academic high schools really represent children pursuing an academic diploma to prepare them for college and how many are in the general

course described by many as a holding operation for youngsters who are being prepared for nothing. Another very revealing statistic indicates that of the June 1963 graduating class out of 20, 729 children obtaining an academic diploma only 331 were Puerto Ricans. We also know that of the Puerto Ricans attending vocational high schools 50% drop out before finishing and 56% of those in academic high schools drop out before graduating. If we look into one very important aspect of how the Puerto Rican child is doing in the elementary levels we find that a study in 1961 of a selected Manhattan neighborhood showed that by the time they reached the third grade, 3 in 10 of the Puerto Rican students in the group were one and a half years retarded in reading. At the 8th level two thirds of the Puerto Rican children in the group studied were more than three years retarded in reading.

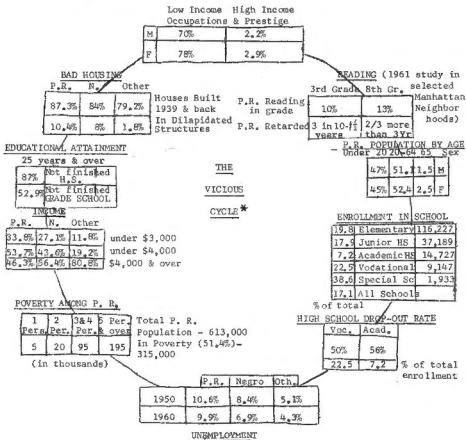
These are serious facts to face and a responsible community looks bravely at its own needs and problems to find solutions. Though it is true that a small group of Puerto Ricans might say that one should not talk about these facts, it is also true that responsible groups of parents and other community leaders in the Puerto Rican community of New York are in search of answers and help to arrest these trends and to establish methods of self help that will help the group pull itself out of this vicious cycle. The emergence of a leadership among the Puerto Ricans in New York who will have the courage to face these facts and undertake the responsibility of doing something about them is crucial. In front of this reality a posture of false pride and vanity in trying to cover up the truth by manipulating statistics so that we can conclude that we are not so badly off, after all, will bring upon us the awesome responsibility of the ostrich like leader who condemns generations of people to ignorance and indigence.

I said earlier that the approach of ASPIRA is unique so allow me to define and describe further its uniqueness. ASPIRA represents the determination of a group of people to lift themselves up by developing their talents, as represented in the intelligence of their children and by developing their cultural strength. This is the basis for the two pronged approach to our program: first, a program of aggressive motivational guidance which includes the formation of practical educational plans, the opening of doors to scholarship and other financial aids, the engagement of parents support in the realization of the youth's plans; second, a program of leadership training which gives practical experience in the exercise of leadership in actual club situations as well as the more formalized training in leadership techniques and problem analysis as they relate to the condition of the Puerto Rican New Yorker and the general New York community. Through these two programs run the distinct thread of identity with a culture by using in programs, whenever possible, materials and experiences to impart knowledge of the history, culture, traditions and knowledge of the great men of Puerto Rico.

The determination of the Puerto Rican New Yorker to establish self-help efforts such as ASPIRA do not represent an attempt to segregate ourselves. It can not succeed unless it is understood and unless there are channels of communication and cooperation between it and the educational system. ASPIRA and its method should complement the work done in the school. At present there is a very good working relationship between ASPIRA and the Board of Education. The same kind of cooperation has been established with other agencies, churches and

community groups. Although we are a very young agency, three years old, some sectors of the educational community know us well yet there are misunderstandings in perceiving us as an agency which works exclusively with the middle class child. This is due to the predisposition of some to understand that only the middle class child is motivated or responds to motivation. ASPIRA works with the underachiever as well as with the achiever, with the very small group of middle class children who we have as well as with the large group of children from low income families. I repeat that our efforts can not succeed in a vacuum and although we pursue self identity and knowledge of our cultural heritage the ultimate objective of ASPIRA is to help our community speed the process of becoming fully participating members of the New York community.

SOME SIGNIFICANT EMPLOYMENT FACTS ON P. R. NEW YORKERS



(*) Facts in this chart have been obtained from the 1960 U.S. Census, the Board of Education of New York City and materials prepared from the Office of the City Administration of N. Y. C. as used for the Puerto Rican Forum, Inc. study entitled The Puerto Rican Community Development Project, November 1964